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Minutes of Meeting of Housing, Community and Culture Strategic Policy Committee held in via MS Teams on Wednesday, 1 December 2021.

Members Present:

Councillor Thomas Mulligan (Cathaoirleach)
Oluwakemi Aina Fawehinmi
Councillor Padraig Fallon
Councillor Sean McDermott
Councillor Paddy O'Rourke

Officials Present:

Mary Quinn, Director of Services, Housing, Corporate Services, Community and Cultural Services
Samantha Healy, Senior Executive Officer Corporate Services and Housing
Justin Fannon, Senior Executive Officer Housing Capital
Kieran Brett, Meetings Administrator
Suzanne Duffy, Administrative Officer, Housing
Susan Barry, Community Development

Apologies:

Councillor Mary Bohan
Councillor Enda Stenson

28 Adoption of Minutes

Proposed by Councillor Sean McDermott, seconded by Councillor Padraig Fallon, and UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED:

‘That the Minutes of the Housing Policy, Social and Cultural Development Strategic Policy Committee Meeting held on 6th October 2021 be adopted.’

29 Receive update on Housing Action Plan

Agenda item number 2- *Receive update on Housing Action Plan* - and item number 3 - *Housing Update* - were taken as one item.

Ms Mary Quinn informed the members that the Housing Action Plan has been prepared and will be presented to the elected members at the Municipal District meetings in December.

Ms Quinn informed the members that the Housing Action Plan sets out a plan for the delivery of Social Housing in Leitrim over the five year period 2022 through to 2026. The plan is cognisant of the social housing delivery targets set for Leitrim Country Council by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The Social Housing delivery target for Leitrim is 139 units over this period, with this number broken down for each year as follows: 2022 – 30 units, 2023 - 26 units, 2024 – 26 units, 2025 – 28 units, 2026 – 29 units. The current housing need in Leitrim is 201 households, net of transfers.

In preparing the Housing Action Plan, Leitrim County Council has made provision for a 30% increase on the target set by the Department, with the plan projecting delivery of 180 units over the course of the 5-year plan. This increased target is to take account of situations where projects may not come to fruition or be significantly delayed.

The members were informed that the intention of the Government is 40% of the social housing target would be delivered through the voluntary sector by Approved Housing Bodies. In Leitrim the operations of the voluntary sector are not at a level that could be expected to deliver this number of units and the Housing Action Plan has been prepared with the intention the Leitrim County Council will deliver the required units through schemes, such as Local Authority Build, Buy and Renew or Turnkey Developments. The Capital Acquisition Scheme will be available to the Voluntary Sector if they wish to pursue this.

Based on the Housing Assessment needs analysis Leitrim County Council currently do not have a requirement to provide any Affordable Housing units. This is similar to 14 other Local Authorities in the state. Should this requirement change then the Housing Action Plan can be amended accordingly.

Mr Justin Fannon gave the members a more in-depth presentation which set out the number of units to be delivered through various schemes and proposals in each year of the plan. The presentation as shared with members is set out in Appendix 1 to this document.

Cllr Thomas Mulligan queried if there was a possibility that some developments may not come to fruition.

Cllr Sean McDermott queried if the County Development Plan 2022-2028 will have any impact on this plan and the targets set in it.

Cllr Sean McDermott further queried if land banks for housing were being provided in smaller towns and villages in the county as the availability of housing in these towns and villages may help to grow and sustain these communities.

Cllr Padraig Fallon queried if the Local Authority would purchase properties or land banks in smaller towns and villages if the situation arose that land and properties are problematic to source in larger centres.

Cllr Padraig Fallon highlighted the excellent work carried out by the technical and maintenance housing staff and also stated that the Local Authority should consider directly employing additional trades people to speed up the turnaround of social housing units or bring additional units online quicker.

Cllr Paddy O'Rourke complimented the work of the technical and maintenance staff of Leitrim County Council for the effective and efficient manner in which they carry out their work. He supported the views of Cllr McDermott & Fallon regarding smaller towns and villages and said it would be preferable if the plan was more ambitious for the smaller towns and villages. Cllr O'Rourke queried if it was possible to apply penalties or repercussions to

contractors where there is a delay in the delivery of housing units.

Cllr Thomas Mulligan queried if persons with vacant properties on the main streets of towns and villages were asked to consider bringing their properties back into residential use and if any such properties in Mohill were considered for inclusion in this plan.

Mr Justin Fannon advise the members that an additional 30% of units was included as it is possible that the units projected for delivery through the Part V planning process may not come to fruition as the development that have being granted planning permission have not yet come online. Units projected for delivery through Approved Housing Bodies may also not come to fruition. There is reasonable confidence that units projected through LA build schemes or Turnkey developments will be delivered.

Mr Fannon advised the members that consideration will be given to acquiring suitable parcels of land in smaller towns and villages that are appropriate to the need of the area. In these areas, the delivery of housing units through the Buy and Renew scheme may be more appropriate.

The application of penalties or liquidated damages on contractors is difficult to apply. The Local Authority is not allowed to pursue liquidated damages from contractors carrying out works under Minor Works Contracts.

Mr Justin Fannon said the Vacant Homes Officer has identified a number of properties in towns and villages throughout the county. In Mohill, this process hasn't brought any homes into use as the owners were not interested in the Lease & Renew scheme. The Local Authority has identified some existing properties in Mohill suitable for social housing and these are being pursued through the Buy and Renew scheme.

Ms Mary Quinn advised that the Housing Strategy is an element of the County Development Plan and therefore the housing delivery targets are considered.

The current demand for housing units is in the larger Tier 1 and Tier2 towns in the county. This is where the Local Authority must provide land banks and housing units in the first instance.

The turnaround time for re-tenanting existing stock was set as a priority, but COVID-19 has had an impact on this activity. As COVID-19 restrictions were lifted, demand and growth in the construction sector has increased significantly. This has meant that there is lack of available contractors and skilled labour to carry out necessary works.

Ms Samantha Healy advised the members that maintenance works are impacted by challenges in engaging contractors and supply chain issues and lead times with materials. The tendering process of specialised maintenance work, such as energy efficiency works, adds to delays in the turnaround time.

There are 4 maintenance teams employed by Leitrim County Council and these are carrying out low level maintenance works. The average turnaround time for a property is currently

31.4 weeks. It is expected that this will be reduced to 30 weeks by year end which is in line with the national average. Had COVID-19 and supply chain issues not impacted operations, the turnaround time of properties would be closer to 22 weeks.

30 Housing Update

Agenda item number 3 - *Housing Update* – was considered with agenda item number 2- *Receive update on Housing Action Plan*.

31 Community Update

Ms Susan Barry advised the members that the council had recently received €258,000 in funding through the Community Activities Fund administered by the Dept. of Rural and Community Development. Guidelines and eligibility criteria for community groups wishing to apply for funding for projects under this fund are currently being considered. The guidelines and eligibility criteria will be considered for approval by the LCDC in the coming weeks after which a funding call will be issued to the community sector for suitable projects.

The Council recently secured €50,000 in funding for Digital Support from Clár. This will be used in a Library project to train and support older persons in the setup and use of digital technology.

The Age Friendly strategy is currently being prepared. Stakeholder meetings have taken place in recent weeks, and it is hoped to have a draft strategy document available for consideration at the next meeting.

32 Receive update on Decade of Centenaries Programme

Ms Pauline Brennan advised the members that this programme of commemorations which ends in 2023, is entering a sensitive phase, with commemorations for events such as the Civil War and the foundation of the state taking place in the coming two years.

The emphasis will be on community led commemoration and reflection events with a particular focus on events that impacted parishes throughout the county.

Funding of €60,000 was received from the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media for events in Leitrim in 2021. Two of the more significant events that received support in Leitrim in 2021, were the Selton Hill and Sheemore commemorations. The Sheemore commemoration was impacted by COVID-19 and it is hoped that it will be possible to mark the occasion in 2022 on the occasion of the 101st anniversary.

Seven other events received financial support under this funding allocation. A Leitrim County Council event took place on July 11th to mark the anniversary of the signing of the War of Independence truce. A supplement entitled “Leitrim 1921 - a collection of stories, memories and history” was published in the Leitrim Observer in October 2021. Further

information on all events is available on the website www.leitrimdoc.ie.

As part of the programme, a 6 month's residency by historian Dr. Jack Kavanagh was facilitated. The focus of the residency programme was to work with communities and individuals on local historical events and it has resulted in preparatory work for future centenary events.

The programme of events was impacted by COVID-19 with many events taking place virtually in 2021. It is expected that commemorations taking place in the early part of 2022 will also be online or virtual events.

It is hoped the funding allocation in 2022 will be similar to that received in 2021. Once the level of funding for 2022 is known, workshops will be held with community groups to assist them in planning and organising events.

Cllr Pdraig Fallon asked that Leitrim County Council contact the organisers of the Sean McDiarmada Summer School as they have number of possible projects that may be eligible for funding under this programme. This was supported by Cllr Sean McDermott.

Clr Sean McDermott queried if the term of residency of Dr. Jack Kavanagh had come to an end.

Ms Pauline Brennan advised that initial contact had been made with the Sean McDiarmada Summer School organisers and the Council would continue to engage with them.

Ms Brennan advised that the period of residency of the historian came to an end in early November. It is hoped that another period of residency of three months duration, will be offered later in 2022, through an open competition.

33 Summary of issues for the Corporate Policy Group

Mr Kieran Brett summarised the items from this meeting for presentation to the Corporate Policy Group and Council.

34 Date and Time of the Next Meeting

Mr. Kieran Brett informed the members that the next meeting of the Housing, Cultural & Community SPC is scheduled for Wednesday 9th February 2022 at 10 am. Mr. Brett further informed the members of the schedule of meetings for 2022 as follows:

Wednesday 9th February 2022, 10 am
Wednesday 18th May 2022 10, am
Wednesday 28th September 2022, 10 am

Wednesday 30th November 2022, 10 am

This concluded the business of the meeting.

SIGNED: _____
Councillor Thomas Mulligan
Chairperson

SIGNED: _____
Kieran Brett
Meetings Administrator
Housing, Community and
Culture Strategic Policy
Committee

DATE: Wednesday, 9 February 2022

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